UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

Department of Public Information • Central News Section • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/1904
31 May 1995

WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General, in report to Security Council, says UNPROFOR's current role is untenable and must be changed; sets out four options for Council to consider; focus should remain provision of humanitarian aid and promotion of peace process.

+ UNPROFOR reports no significant change in number of personnel detained or restricted by Bosnian Serbs; situation in Sarajevo remains tense after early outbreak of fighting.

+ Security Council says six-member mission will leave New York for Western Sahara region this weekend.

+ Disarmament Commission concludes annual session by adopting final report to General Assembly; fails to reach agreement on guidelines for nuclear disarmament or review of Third Disarmament Decade.

+ Committee on Relations with Host Country considers proposals by Secretary-General for solving problem of diplomatic indebtedness.

+ UNEP Governing Council concludes eighteenth session in Nairobi by adopting programme of work for 1996-1997.

+ Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice begins two-week session in Vienna.

+ Subcommittee on Small Territories hears DPI report on dissemination of decolonization information.

+ United Nations University Press to launch publication on policies of Member States toward Organization.

* * *

The current role of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) is untenable and must be changed, according to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. In a report to the Security Council, he said the

For information media—not an official record

Organization's primary task in Bosnia and Herzegovina should remain that of delivering humanitarian aid and helping to create conditions on the ground favouring the peace process.

The Secretary-General said the United Nations faced a truly defining moment in its reaction to events in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which would have a decisive effect on its standing for many years to come. Three inter-connected objectives represented the Organization's very essence: the quest for peace, the protection of human life and the rejection of the culture of death. He put forward four principal options for consideration by the Council.

The first option was the withdrawal of UNPROFOR, but the Secretary-General said that would be tantamount to the abandonment of the Bosnian people. It would also be an admission of the Organization's inability to help resolve a war in which force had been used to try to change the ethnic map of a Member State and in which the parties had been guilty of attacks against civilians and other atrocities.

The second option was retention of the status quo. However, that would further erode the ability of the United Nations to provide humanitarian aid and achieve diplomatic progress. It would also bring further United Nations casualties and more damage to the Organization's credibility.

The third option was to change UNPROFOR's mandate and to provide the additional force necessary to implement it. However, the use of such force would not be appropriate for a peace-keeping operation like UNPROFOR. In that event, UNPROFOR should be replaced with a multinational force, authorized by the Council, but under the command of countries contributing troops to it, as was the case in Somalia and Haiti.

The fourth option was to revise the mandate to include only those tasks which a peace-keeping operation could realistically be expected to carry out in the circumstances prevailing in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The peace-keeping operation would seek to negotiate agreements between the parties and monitor them. It would maintain a presence in the safe areas but not use force to defend them. It would support humanitarian operations, and would use force only in self-defence. That option might require some reinforcement initially, but would eventually lead to a reduction in the deployment.

* * *

The situation in Sarajevo remained tense today, following an outbreak of fighting around the Jewish Cemetery this morning, according to a United Nations spokesman. He said there had been no significant change in the number of United Nations personnel detained or restricted by the Bosnian Serbs. Meanwhile, there were fresh sightings of Bosnian Serb troops wearing United Nations uniforms and driving stolen vehicles.

The spokesman said the Bosnian Serbs had refused to give clearance for a flight to evacuate wounded French soldiers from Sarajevo. However, the peace-keepers were later evacuated by road as their wounds were not

(more)

life-threatening. There were no major incidents elsewhere in Bosnia and Herzegovina, although the Bosnian Serbs took over two more United Nations observation posts in the Gorazde area. That left only one post there occupied by United Nations personnel, in an area controlled by the Bosnian Government.

* * *

The Security Council has said that its mission to the Western Sahara region will leave New York on 3 June for a visit lasting around six days. The mission will be composed of six members of the Council: Argentina, Botswana, France, Honduras, Oman and the United States. In a Presidential statement on Friday, the Council had expressed concern about obstacles to further progress in the implementation of the Settlement Plan for Western Sahara, saying it would send a mission to the region.

In a note issued yesterday, the Council set out the mission's terms of reference: to impress upon the parties the necessity of cooperating fully with the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) in implementing all aspects of the Plan, and to underline the fact that any further delay would put MINURSO's future at risk; to assess progress and identify problems in the identification process, bearing in mind the deadline for the referendum of January 1996; and to identify problems in other areas relevant to the fulfilment of the Plan, including the reduction of Moroccan troops, the confinement of Polisario troops, the release of political prisoners and detainees, the exchange of prisoners of war and the return of refugees.

* * *

The Disarmament Commission has concluded its annual session at Headquarters by adopting its final report to the General Assembly. That report included the reports of the Commission's three working groups. The Commission concluded its consideration of international arms transfers with agreement on a structure for, and the scope of, guidelines for that area. However, there was no agreement on guidelines for nuclear disarmament or for the review of the implementation of the Declaration of the 1990s as the Third Disarmament Decade.

Speakers expressed disappointment at the lack of concrete results on two of the three issues considered by the Commission. However, the Chairman of the working group on the review of the Third Disarmament Decade said that while its discussions had been inconclusive, a basis for future negotiations had been established.

* * *

The Committee on Relations with the Host Country met yesterday to consider a series of proposals by the Secretary-General on how to solve the problem of diplomatic indebtedness. The representative of the United States told the Committee that a total of 31 permanent missions owed more than $9 million to local creditors. He expressed support for the Secretary-General's

(more)

proposals, which included provisions by which the Legal Counsel would seek explanations from the mission concerned if a matter involved a Permanent Representative.

In his report to the Committee, the Secretary-General said the problem of diplomatic indebtedness was a matter of significant concern to the United Nations. Non-payment of debts reflected badly on the diplomatic community and tarnished the Organization's image. He stated, however, that the vast majority of the 184 missions and 1,800 diplomats in New York honoured their obligations.

* * *

The eighteenth session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was a turning point for the Programme, according to Executive Director Elizabeth Dowdeswell. She said the two-week session in Nairobi was remarkable for the level of consensus achieved. However, UNEP could only build on its achievements if it received the necessary environmental and political guidance from Governments, along with adequate and predictable financial support.

The Council adopted a new integrated programme of work for 1996-1997, and a programme budget of $90-$105 million. Issues relating to the revitalization of UNEP's role and functions, and the changes necessary for a more effective implementation of the international environmental agenda dominated the agenda for the session.

* * *

The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice has begun a two-week session in Vienna. The Commission will consider a wide range of proposals for combating transnational criminality, including trafficking in minors, illegal arms trafficking, smuggling of illegal migrants, corruption of public officials and computer tampering.

The Commission will review progress made on worldwide surveys of crime trends and the operations of criminal justice systems, as well as initiatives to acquire and process crime-related data. It will also look at the technical cooperation and advisory services of the United Nations crime prevention and criminal justice programme.

* * *

The Department of Public Information (DPI) issued 62 press releases and produced 24 radio programmes on decolonization issues during the last year, a DPI representative has told the Subcommittee on Small Territories, Petitions, Information and Assistance. Mustapha Tlili said that the 68 United Nations Information Centres (UNICs) had also continued to distribute DPI information material during April and May. He made those comments yesterday, as the Subcommittee considered the question of the dissemination of information on decolonization.

(more)

* * *

The United Nations University Press will launch a new publication, "The United Nations System: The Policies of Member States," in the Dag Hammarskjold Library Auditorium tomorrow. The book is the product of a comparative study of national policies toward the Organization, undertaken by Professor John Trent of the University of Ottawa and two colleagues. It examines the historical development of international organizations, reviews recent proposals for United Nations reform, and considers eight policy case-studies.

* *** *